

### Lieutenant Governor Talks Mitigation-Gap Fire Damage Addressed, Federal Funding Called For

Santa Barbara Independent, July 16, 2008

By Ben Preston

Although the Gap Fire has all but come to a close, officials are still dealing with the aftermath. Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi addressed the issues related to mitigation of the damage caused by the fire in a press conference today at Santa Barbara County Fire Station 11 in Goleta. Joined by Goleta Mayor Michael Bennett, County First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal, and Michael Harris, Director of the County Office of Emergency Services, Garamendi discussed the need to assess the funding needs caused by fire damage now, before disaster strikes again. "As [the Gap Fire] enters its final days, we need to look to the future. We're looking at an extremely expensive fire season," he said, saying that the state has already spent over \$100 million on recent fires. Pointing to the impasse currently faced by the state over its budget, he said decisive action needs to be taken in order to prepare for more fires and aftermath cleanup efforts, calling upon the federal government to support California in its fight against wildfires.

Santa Barbara County Fire Station 11 in Goleta

One of the problems often faced when wilderness areas are denuded by wildfire is flooding. Pointing to a map of the area burned by the Gap Fire—showing that although most of the fire occurred on federal land, most of the watersheds below the mountains contain residences—Harris stated that the federal government has a responsibility to help mitigate the impacts of the fire upon areas which could potentially be flooded when rain comes. As the Forest Service usually submits a Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) report after a major fire, Garamendi called for the federal government to include in their report an assessment of affected areas outside the federal boundary. "The rains this winter will cause problems," he said. "Even in the most remote forests, there are downstream effects that need to be taken into account."

"We can't do it alone," said Bennett of funding mitigation efforts. "We need the assistance of the County, and most importantly, we need the assistance of the federal government and the president of the United States." As President George W. Bush toured wildfires statewide from a helicopter with Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger today, local leaders called for federal assistance. "We're scared to death that if we don't get the mitigation funds we need, we may face another disaster with the flooding," said Carbajal, thanking the Lieutenant Governor for his support.

L to R Goleta Mayor Michael Bennett, County First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal, Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi, and Michael Harris, Director of the County Office of

### Emergency Services

L to R Goleta Mayor Michael Bennett, County First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal, Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi, and Michael Harris, Director of the County Office of Emergency Services

Aside from identifying the need for federal support in the coming months, Garamendi was also adamant that residents be prepared for other evacuations related to fires and flooding. "You need to be prepared to evacuate," he said. "Think ahead and think of what you want to take. The fire season is not over, so make sure you have enough insurance to cover your home." Having served as the State's insurance commissioner, he encouraged Goleta residents, none of whom live in a flood zone, to purchase what he said is relatively inexpensive flood insurance. Floods, he said, are typically not covered by homeowner or fire insurance.

Speaking to a few of the possible causes of this early fire season, which—with over 2,000 fires recorded to date—he called the earliest and the worst one to date, Garamendi said that the State has established a clear policy on reducing the carbon dioxide emissions linked to global climate change. "We know that climate change will change the flora of the state, and that is likely to increase fire risk," he said. "We have to adapt, and that is going to take wisdom, programs and policies, and money." He also noted that the dry spring season and statewide water shortage was a major contribution to the early initiation of this year's fire season. "We're going to need a water delivery system in the [Sacramento] Delta to get more water from Northern California down south. This peripheral canal, known as the Delta Fix, will require federal funding."